THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War 50¢

Volume 28, Number 2 Fall 1998

No Flags, No Bugles! Just Comrades and Friends

Veterans Day Events, Chicago, 1998

Joe Miller

As we entered the Harold Washington Library in Chicago that Tuesday afternoon, Brooke, Jeff, and I were somewhat awe-struck by the immensity of the place and its obvious commitment to keeping the memory of Harold Washington alive. What a great way to commemorate the life and struggles of a fine mayor, and what a perfect place to hold an event that celebrates the history and continued existence of Vietnam Veterans Against the War!

Harold Washington was a great friend to progressive activists. He spoke at VVAW events regularly, and while he was mayor he made sure that VVAW was represented in anything that had to do with veterans' issues in Chicago.

The three of us drove up from Urbana-Champaign on November 10 to attend a pre-Veterans Day event at the library. This was part of the library's "Society in Focus Series," and it was to include a viewing of Denis Mueller's 1997 film "Citizen Soldier," as well as a discussion with Richard Stacewicz of his book "Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War" (Twayne, 1997).

As the film began, there were perhaps eight to ten people in the room, but as the film came to a close, there were around twenty people there. There was some lively discussion with Richard, Denis, and Barry Romo of VVAW's National Office about the historical and continuing role of VVAW in struggles for social justice. Richard was able to talk about how his book changed from being "about" VVAW from the outside to being a book "by" VVAW through the words of its

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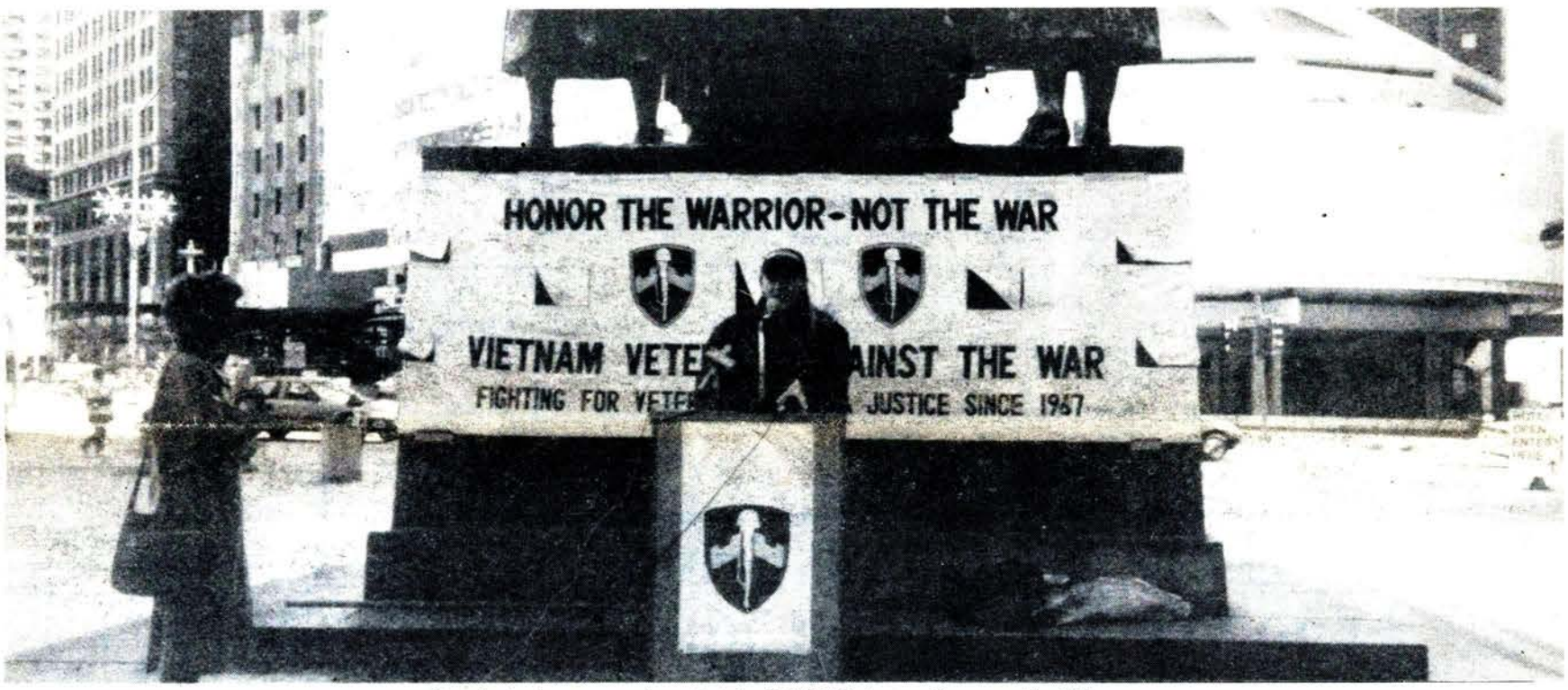

Brooke Anderson speaks out at the VVAW Veterans Day event in Chicago

Speaking of Peace

Jeanne Douglas

Speech delivered at VVAW Veterans Day Event in Chicago November 11, 1998

Not long ago, I was chauffeuring my teenage daughter and two friends. We had about an hour's drive ahead of us and there was lots of chatter from the back seat: school, teachers, boys (of course), and then to more serious topics such as Clinton's behavior, gay rights and finally — to my surprise — women in the military. While they were in agreement that women should be allowed in the military, they were in disagreement about whether they should fight in combat. After some debate my daughter tried to bring me into the conversation to bolster her position: didn't I agree that women shouldn't fight in a war?

All of you who have raised teenagers know that sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach when your child wants a black or white answer to a complex and very "gray" questions. I stuttered for a bit and then fumbled for an answer. First, the feminist part of me said that I believed that if women want equal rights they must be willing to take on equal responsibility — even when the jobs are pretty ugly. Therefore, if there was a war, women should assume their share of the workload in and out of combat. But (and now I moved on to my pacifist self) perhaps the important debate was not whether women should or shouldn't be in combat, but whether anybody should be in combat....

I felt I had said something profound and there was a fraction of a second while they digested this. Then they moved on to a lively exchange about whether girls should be required to take swimming in high school.

I had many more wise things to tell them. I wanted to talk about the tremendous scarring, both physical and psychological, that young men and women in combat

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VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR

PO Box 408594
Chicago, IL 60640
http://www.prairienet.org/vvaw/
vvaw@prairienet.org

From the National Office

DAVE KETTENHOFEN

The current VVAW fundraising and membership drive is coming along just fine. We have recruited many new members, had hordes of old members re-up and have received some very generous contributions. Thanks to all: your donations are greatly appreciated!

The new membership cards have been printed and all dues-paying members will receive them upon receipt of their application forms. Just a reminder: to be considered an active member of VVAW you must pay your annual dues of $20. In the past we have been quite lax in this area but have been forced to tighten up a bit in order to keep on keepin' on. If you have not received a letter concerning this matter it means we don't have your current address and you should use the application form included in this issue of ***The Veteran***.

The National Steering Committee Meeting was held in Chicago on October 31 and was well attended. At the meeting, Jeff Machota of Champaign-Urbana, Illinois was elected as an additional member of the National Staff. Jeff maintains VVAW's award-winning website, is instrumental in publishing ***The Veteran*** and flat out does tons and tons of work for the organization. His energy level is contagious and very welcome! Also, Jay Tobin of Eau Claire, Wisconsin will take over as our new Midwest Regional Coordinator. Jay, a Nam vet and combat medic, is a longtime VVAW member who has been active in many progressive causes along with his VVAW work. He hopes to spark some VVAW interest in the Minnesota Twin Cities area.

Hats off to the members of VVAW's newest chapter, Champaign-Urbana! They are doing an incredible amount of work and seem tireless. With a mix of veterans, non-veterans, young college students and old-timers, they maintain our website, edit and publish ***The Veteran***, have printed and sent out the fundraising/membership mailing, hosted two campouts, a Midwest Regional meeting and security workshops, and still find time to take part in VVAW activities in Chicago and Milwaukee. Have I left anything out?

It's really encouraging to see the participation of the young student activists in our organization. They seem very eager to absorb our history and to promote the positive ideals we've worked for. It's not just a one-way street, either: there is much for us crusty old codgers to learn from them too. They offer new perspectives and fresh energy that are needed if we wish to remain a viable organization. Through this younger generation, our history will remain alive and not become just another page in an old book.

The Chicago Chapter has also been quite active this summer and fall, putting on its annual Memorial Day and Veterans Day events. Additionally, its members were instrumental in organizing and staffing the homeless veteran standdowns in Chicago where hundreds of veterans were fed, clothed, and offered other needed services. This was "in the trenches" work. They also recruited volunteers from other VVAW chapters, universities and socially concerned organizations to help with the work. Thanks to all who helped out.

DAVE KETTENHOFEN IS A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR FROM MILWAUKEE.

VVAW, Inc.
National Coordinators

Barry Romo
(773) 327-5756

Pete Zastrow
(847) 864-3975

Joe Miller
(217) 328-2444

Dave Kettenhofen
(414) 481-4614

National Staff
Bill Branson
David Curry
Jeff Machota

Regional Coordinators

EAST
Ben Chitty
(718) 826-1789

SOUTH
Elton Manzione
(706) 369-0546

WEST
Tom Wetzler
eml05081@accd.edu

MIDWEST
Jay Tobin
(715) 832-1989

MILWAUKEE CHAPTER
John Lindquist
(414) 963-0398

see page 19 for membership info

Where We Came From, Who We Are, Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States as well as active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW quickly took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we started the first rap groups to deal with traumatic after-effects of war, setting the example for readjustment counselling at Vet Centers now. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA Hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover-up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange Victims.

Today our government is still financing and arming undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world. Recently, American troops have been sent into combat in the Middle East and Central America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans are still denied justice - facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are being cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent another generation from being put through a similar tragedy and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. JOIN US!

Editorial Collective
Barry Romo, Joe Miller, Jeff Machota & Lisa Boucher

Fraggin'

BILL SHUNAS

Look what Clinton started. Like a distraught sinner, he's going around confessing to anyone who'll listen about how he got it on with Monica. Or did he do something with her which wasn't exactly, but sort of was sex. It's similar to his marijuana smoking, when he sort of did it, but didn't go all the way. Lucky thing he's not gay, or he'd be going around saying, "Don't ask me." Anyway, praise the Lord. Another sinner has confessed and apologized endlessly to anyone who would listen.

Maybe Bobby McNamara got the ball rolling when he confessed he shouldn't have sent all them boys to die in an unwinnable war. Then Clinton picked it up and started his confessions. Who could be next?

Why, here comes George Bush with his national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft. They wrote Bush's memoirs. I thought a memoir was supposed to be your memories of your career that you're supposed to do yourself. I could understand if Reagan needed help with his memoirs, but why Bush?

Anyway, in the book Scowcroft talks about the Gulf War and how the United States decided to invade Iraq in order to control oil in the region. That, of course, is not what they said at the time. Back then they sang a different tune — actually, four or five times, if I remember right. They were going to rescue Kuwait, protect Saudi Arabia, eliminate the new Hitler (Saddam Hussein), and a few other things. Like a salesman at your door trying to sell you the great books of the Western world, Bush searched around until he found something that struck a chord with the American public. So he lied to get the okay for his war.

Meanwhile, protesters went around wearing buttons that said NO BLOOD FOR OIL. Now Bush confesses. It *was* blood for oil. GI blood was shed, vets have Gulf War Syndrome, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children died for oil. But we have a confession. Big deal. Say two Hail Marys, George, and write NO BLOOD FOR OIL one hundred times on the blackboard.

Wait, there's more. It's not only presidents confessing now. The CIA? Praise the Lord! Fred Hitz, who is Inspector General of the CIA, is making confessions too. And the lamb shall lie down with the lion. Back when the United States was promoting the Contra war in Nicaragua, there were charges that the Contras were dirty with drugs. President Reagan and the CIA denied that. They said our guys were pure of heart and pure of motive, sort of like Boy Scouts with M-16s.

Well, Inspector General Hitz came out with his report. Yes, the CIA concealed from Congress and other government agencies that at the time they knew the Contras were smuggling drugs into the United States to help finance their little war. In fact, a CIA informant was present at a meeting in September 1981, where the Contras were brought into being. At that meeting, the Contra leadership decided to begin their war against the legitimate government of Nicaragua. And they decided to finance the war by smuggling drugs into Los Angeles, Little Rock, and Louisville. And our government knew it.

So these guys lied and deceived and are now in retirement enjoying the good life. Of course Clinton didn't get away with his lies. He's had to face Hillary, Chelsea, and self-righteous Republicans. Don't feel sorry for him, though. He's got blood on his hands too. I guess the moral of this story is that the hippies in the anti-war movement were wrong when they raised the slogan MAKE LOVE, NOT WAR. Clinton made all sorts of love and got burned. McNamara, Bush, Scowcroft, and the CIA leaders made war and got the best in marlin fishing and the choicest golf courses.

BILL SHUNAS IS A VIETNAM VETERAN, AUTHOR AND EDITOR OF THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE AMERICAN POSTAL WORKERS UNION AT AMC-O'HARE. HE'S A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHICAGO CHAPTER.

Notes from the Boonies

PAUL WISOVATY

How do you try to tell a bunch of high school kids about Vietnam?

Well, a good way to start is by telling them that you don't think of them as kids. Some people might look at them that way — let's say, the ones who wrote and published and actually spent good taxpayers' money on those history books sitting on their desks — but you're not one of them. You consider them to be young adults, which is the way you're going to talk to them for the next forty-five minutes. If they'd prefer to be talked to like kids, then all they have to do is open that book in front of them — probably titled "The Pageant of American Triumph" or something similarly pandering — and they'll get just what they're looking for. They will instantly be reassured that, as young Bobby Zimmerman once suggested, we've always had God on our side.

Ideally, the first thing you'd like to do is take them back to about 1850, and talk about the real nasty horrors of French Indochinese colonialism. You'd like to talk about Ho at Versailles in 1919, and about the state of anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa at the end of World War I. You'd like to tell them how the Viet Minh helped us out during World War II, and how "the-buck-stops-here" Harry Truman sold out the Vietnamese independence movement for a few pieces of Cold War silver. And you'd like to tell them about how the French got their butts deservedly kicked in 1954, even after the United States poured several hundred million dollars into that last sad bit of Beau Geste bullshit. Well, you don't need me to rehash all of that for you. I mean, you've all studied this stuff, right? Unfortunately, their young adult status notwithstanding, most of these students couldn't find Vietnam on a map of Indochina. So, truth to tell, you have to kind of lead them by the hand, and — at all costs — avoid engendering confusion. They're not all that ignorant of history, but their circuits can overload pretty quickly, and you have to be careful.

So what's your game plan? Well, it doesn't hurt to talk about VVAW. I bring along one of Barry's homemade T-shirts, and ask one of the students to come up front and hold it up for the class. Then I ask them: given the fact that you have probably never before heard of this organization — called Vietnam Veterans Against the War — can anybody give me a good guess as to who might join this organization and why? If nobody answers, you can then assure them that this is not a trick question. (Several students laugh.) Then somebody raises his hand, and you say, "Yes, sir?" or "Yes, ma'am?", and they usually give you a fairly accurate answer. (Like I said, it's not a trick question.)

And there's your opening! You say, "Hey, look, there has never before, in this country's history, been a war in which thousands of its veterans came home and said, 'We're tired of this, this is bullshit, and we're not going to stand by and watch our buddies continue to get slaughtered — and slaughter a whole bunch of other people — to make LBJ and Wall Street look good.'" (Note: usage of "bullshit" is optional. When I'm on a roll I use it; this may or may not be a wise choice.) But you've got their attention. You talk about the origins of the anti-war movement, the Nixon White House, and all those Spiro Agnew types who questioned whether we were even veterans in the first place. You tell them about Dewey Canyon III, and all of those decorated Nam vets who tore their medals off their chests and threw them at the White House. And you say, "You know why they did that? They did that because that was their way of saying, to our government, 'This isn't our fault; it's yours. You did this to us, and you'll be awful damned lucky if we, or two or three generations of Vietnamese, ever forgive you for it."

To be honest, I have never been able to recreate this scenario for the students without getting physically emotional. I suppose that some of them may attribute this to my advanced age and lack of self-control. Others, I hope,

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Vietnam Era Education Center Opens In New Jersey

Dave Cline

If you're traveling down the Garden State Parkway toward the Jersey shore, get off at Holmdel (Exit 116) and you'll find the state's Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and, next to it, the Vietnam Era Education Center. After much delay, the Education Center finally opened its doors at the end of September.

The New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated in May 1995. Built in a circular design of 366 black granite panels, it bears the names of the 1,553 state residents and the dates they lost their lives or became missing in action. In the center stands a statue of a nurse aiding a wounded soldier while another GI looks on.

From the start, the plan called for the Memorial and the Education Center to be constructed as sister projects. After the Memorial's dedication, work began on the Center to provide a legacy to future generations. Created by the firm that did the Holocaust Memorial and the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, there is a timeline mural tracing Vietnam's history, including American intervention and what was happening in this country at the time.

When the Center's planning committee first presented the proposed exhibits, a number of objections were raised. Some felt that the role of women in the military was ignored. Others felt that more emphasis should be on what it was like serving in the war zone. Probably the loudest complaints were voiced regarding the displays about the anti-war movement. Letters soon appeared in local newspapers saying that the Center would dishonor the dead and should be located at Rutgers University, a nearby college that was a center of anti-war activism. Rumors were spread that one of the displays would be a picture of Jane Fonda. Some went around labeling staff members "pro-communist" and tried to discourage people from supporting fundraising efforts. Syndicated press articles appeared throughout the country telling the story as a case of "soldiers vs. protesters," a theme popularized by government-sponsored publications during the war to divide GIs from civilians, hoping to stop anti-war sentiments from growing among the ranks.

Some Vietnam veterans bought that story then and still believe it today. They feel that by opposing the war, people were not supporting them. But the reality is that the anti-war movement was the best friend the GIs had in this country. It was people who refused to be silent about the manipulation and deceit by Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. Those lies cost the lives of over 58,000 Americans and 2-3 million Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian peoples. Many returning veterans became protesters themselves, joining GI and veterans' peace groups, participating in anti-war coalitions and demonstrations, and supporting peace candidates like Gene McCarthy and George McGovern.

In fact, it was the so-called "patriots" with their tired rhetoric supporting the war that allowed the government to send more and more men to their deaths. And often these "patriots" turned their backs on us when we came home because we were not saying what they wanted to hear.

To reconcile the conflicting views about the Center, the planning committee (made up largely of veterans) held open meetings. After much discussion and debate, some changes were agreed upon. Captions that some felt were derogatory to veterans were modified. Mention of drug use among American soldiers was removed. To the opening day, arguments persisted on what to say about those GIs still missing.

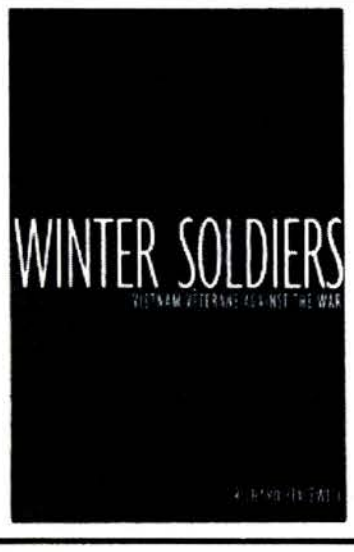
Does the Center's exhibition tell the truth, or is it a whitewash of what happened? I was able to see the final presentation at a preview for the veterans' community several days before the official opening. What I saw was pretty good. Photos with captions surround the circular room. A lot of information is presented. While it's not the same as living then, you begin to get a feel for what was going on.

Represented in the exhibit are Vietnam's long struggle for independence, the Cold War, the civil rights movement, anti-war protests, youth culture, the music and politics of the times. The draft, life in the military, the Tet Offensive, and the My Lai massacre are the subjects of displays. One panel called "Veterans Begin To Protest" shows photos of a VVAW demonstration and of spokesman John Kerry testifying before Congress during Operation Dewey Canyon III, and it tells the story of veterans' efforts to stop the killing. In addition to the timeline encircling the room, there is a video area with tapes of vets talking about their experiences. There's also a display of letters sent home, Department of Defense death notifications to families, and GIs' snapshots.

The Vietnam Era Education Center is a good place to begin to learn what the Vietnam War means for this country. The Center is the first project of its kind anywhere, and it will be great for high school field trips. If it encourages young people to learn more about what happened then, it will help to insure that these things don't happen again. I think it's well worth the effort.

For more information, contact the Vietnam Era Education Center at PO Box 648, Holmdel, NJ 07733 or call (800) 648-VETS.

Dave Cline is a 100% disabled Vietnam vet and a former national coordinator of VVAW.



Winter Soldiers

An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War

by Richard Stacewicz

Winter Soldiers asks why some of the Americans who served in Vietnam returned home to oppose the war. Growing up in the shadows of World War II, these young men volunteered or were drafted as "citizen soldiers." But their patriotic fervor was shaken by the brutal realities of this war. Back in the US they joined the antiwar movement and, as soldiers who had actually fought, they could not be dismissed as draft dodgers. Stacewicz seeks to tell their story by interviewing over thirty members of the VVAW and drawing on their archives, FBI files, and Nixon Administration records.

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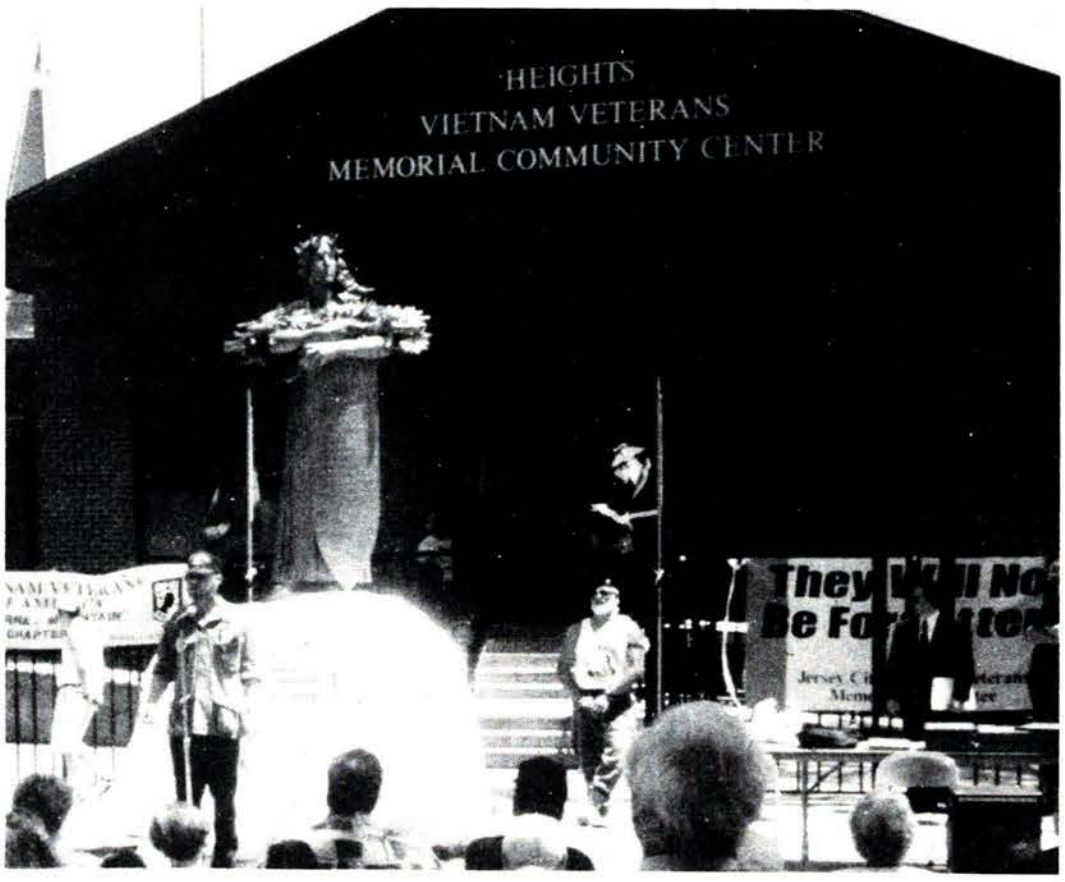

On May 30, 1998, a Memorial Day commemoration was held in Jersey City, NJ to remember the 61 local men who lost their lives in the Vietnam War. A previous commemoration in 1987 had been only half completed when local politicians derailed the Memorial effort. Last year, the Jersey City Vietnam Veterans Memorial Committee was organized, with the motto "They Will Not Be Forgotten." Committee members were able to get the City government to repair and identify the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Community Center. Local newspapers gave extensive coverage to the effort, and the City Council passed a resolution of support. On Memorial Day, a crowd of 400 people turned out for a diverse, well-organized program to honor the dead and rededicate the Center. Many of the commemorated men's families participated, along with twelve veterans' organizations who provided color guards. "Amazing Grace" was played by the Hudson County Pipe & Drum Band, and "Taps" was performed by members of the Dickinson High School Band. Moving speeches were given, and Girl Scouts read the names of the fallen. Jan Barry, VVAW's first president, read selections of his and other veterans' poetry. There were also spiritual presentations by Native American Joe Cross and Father Thomas Olsen. The photo shows Master of Ceremonies David Cline calling the meeting to order while aide Fred DeSiano stands by.

Notes from the Boonies

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may see it in a different perspective.

What are some other effective approaches to use? Well, I very quickly make a comparison between the American and Vietnamese revolutions. They've studied the first one, so this is pretty useful. I tell them that what the British tried to do to us, during our war for independence, was very similar to what we tried to do to the Vietnamese in their struggle two centuries later. I then add that, in both revolutions, the good guys won and the bad guys lost. This is important. They realize that our involvement in Vietnam had a few flaws, but most of them have been spoon-fed the notion that it can all be written off as "some good intentions that just didn't work out." Yeah. Anyway, as I say, this is important, because it may be the first time in their lives that they've been asked to look at their government as "the bad guys." You may get some reaction from this, although I've used it six times, and I haven't yet.

I talk about the racist nature of the war, and I get very explicit about that. I talk about the different experiences of combat and support troops, and I emphasize that I'm not just referring to how much "action" they saw; I'm also talking about their experiences with the civilian population. (The locals at Bearcat would remind you constantly that "GI number 1, VC number 10." You didn't hear a whole lot of that when you were passing through a village in an armored cav column.) I talk about sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, because, as we all know, all of those things were very important parts of our Vietnam experience. In many ways, they helped to define not only the nature of that war, but what happened to a lot of us after we "left" it.

I suppose I have to admit that I really don't know what impression I did (or didn't) make, upon six high school history classes in Douglas County, Illinois, in the spring of 1998. I may or may not have taught them something. But for what it's worth, I got some reinforcement of something I'd hoped for all along: they're not just dumb high school kids. They really did have some pretty good questions, and sometimes I didn't have the best answers.

Next year, I'll try to do a little better.

PAUL WISOVATY IS A MEMBER OF VVAW. HE LIVES IN TUSCOLA, IL, WHERE HE WORKS FOR THE PROBATION DEPARTMENT. HE WAS IN VIETNAM WITH THE US ARMY 9TH DIVISION IN 1968.

Celebrating Black History Month

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Just Comrades and Friends

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members. In this way, he said, the information is passed to current generations of activists in a more direct, less academic, fashion. Denis' film was also the perfect backdrop for a discussion of Richard's book, as it shows the transformation of Vietnam veterans into social justice activists, even including newer generations of veterans in work such as the homeless veterans' standdowns each year.

The next morning, November 11, continued to be quite windy and rather cold, and we knew the corner of Wabash and Wacker Drive was going to be like a wind tunnel for the participants in our ceremony. A minor saving grace was that the sun was shining, so it may not have seemed so cold as in previous years.

Barry and I arrived first so we could set up the podium, the mike, and the banner. Finally, people began to drift into the area just east of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fountain (covered over, of course, for the oncoming Winter season). Many of the faces are those we only see at Veterans Day or Memorial Day, but they are sure to be there. Jim Gates, an African American vet of the atomic tests in the western desert, was there, though he is slowly dying and always homeless or near-to. Old friends from Veterans for Peace were also there. Other social justice activists from the Chicago area also showed up. Eventually, we had a cozy little group of around fifty or so comrades and friends. A few media folk usually show up late, and this occasion was no different.

Ray Parrish of VVAW's Chicago Chapter was the emcee for the event. He started us off with a sort of "prayer," which called for everyone to "Be excellent to each other, and party on, dudes!" This got everyone chuckling and probably helped increase blood circulation so we didn't feel quite so cold.

Bill Davis, former national coordinator of VVAW, was first on the speakers' list. He reminded everyone of the continued plight of homeless veterans, pointing out that upwards of 15,000 are on Chicago's streets each day and night. Many of these folks are Gulf War vets, who came home to parades, but still ended up on the streets. Bill pointed out that many went from the unemployment lines into the military, then back to the unemployment lines after their service. He also reminded us of how new generations of veterans are constantly produced through the hypocrisy and immorality of U.S. foreign policy.

Alynne Romo, of the Colombia Support Network, follwed up on this theme, speaking about the so-called "drug wars" in Central America (see text of her speech in this issue). She could not finish her speech with "In conclusion," since there doesn't seem to be any "conclusion" yet.

An exciting element of recent VVAW organizing has been its involvement with young social justice activists such as Brooke Anderson, who happens to be the youngest member of the Champaign-Urbana chapter of VVAW. Brooke, who is only nineteen years old, was an activist back in high school, and she has continued that activism against the racist mascot of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Mayor Harold Washington speaks at a Chicago VVAW Veterans Day event in 1987

Her speech at this Veterans' Day event, however, was about how VVAW continues to have relevance for today's youth (see text in this issue). When Brooke finished her speech, I think many of us "older" activists felt a deep sense of optimism about the future. This is one of the reasons VVAW is still around.

Jeanne Douglas, from the Oak Park Vets Center, is one of the main organizers of the homeless veterans' standdowns in the Chicago area each year. She spoke as a mother concerned about how her daughter and her friends see the world around them (see text in this issue). She talked of the scarring that war produces, both on individuals and on the larger society. She called on everyone to work so that wars don't happen so easily.

Finally, Ray wrapped it up by bringing to everyone's attention the connections between sexual trauma and PTSD, an issue he has recently been working on as a military counselor. Sexual abuse in the military, as in civilian life, produces social costs just as clearly as the more visible wounds suffered through military service.

The ceremony ended, as usual, with each of us laying a flower on the covered fountain in memory of those lost in military adventures and in the struggles for peace and social justice around the world.

JOE MILLER IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF VVAW AND A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHAMPAIGN-URBANA CHAPTER.

Speaking of Peace

continued from page 1

endure. I wanted to talk about the political forces that lead us to believe that armed conflict is a viable solution to any problem. I wanted to talk about racism and classism and how this impacts the selection of soldiers that defend our country. I wanted to talk about individual responsibility to work for peace and justice. Yes, I had many important things to say, but the moment had passed. Soon my opinion would be sought on the proper age to consider a navel piercing.

While I drove and mused to myself, I thought how very young these girls were: innocent, smart, erratic, impressionable, funny, trusting the world to be a safe place — perfect in every way, at least to a mother's eyes. Listening to their chatter made me think we must make sure that this generation of teenagers — that every generation of teenagers — does not have to endure the enormous suffering that is inevitable when we go to war. I know this is not an original thought and I am not the first parent to love my child and want to protect her, but it seems that these children are the reason we must remind ourselves again and again that working for peace is the most valuable work that we can do.

We must honor the fallen soldier, we need to respect and care for the wounded veteran, but our greatest challenge is to make sure this does not happen again! I thank VVAW for this opportunity to be with you again this year, to pause for a moment and think about the sacrifices that veterans have made for us, and to resolve to continue our commitment to peaceful resolutions of all conflicts.

JEANNE DOUGLAS IS TEAM LEADER OF THE OAK PARK, ILLINOIS VET CENTER AND A CO-COORDINATOR OF THE HOMELESS VETERANS' STANDDOWNS IN CHICAGO.

The Late, Great, '68 — and a Public/Personal Anniversary

HORACE COLEMAN

When my "Freedom Bird" left Tan Son Nhut that night, I saw artillery pieces firing flames. Firefights spitting jagged red light. Shells and mortars falling like rain. Bombs blasting. Parachute flares drifting like unstained jellyfish in ink.

But I wasn't going to heaven, just "back to the world." Where James Earl Ray would hack down Martin Luther King. Where frustrated people in Detroit, Trenton, Newark, Baltimore, P-burg — and a few other burgs — would do a poor VC imitation. Just like Nam, the Palace Guard would rush to the Capitol.

I was going where Sirhan Sirhan would X Bobby Kennedy; where Mayor Daley's cops decided, since the streets were full of people raising hell, they should raise hell too. Thereby helping Nixon — he of the "secret plan" to end the war — win the presidential election after expanding it and then abandoning it.

No wonder Mick Jagger was in the studio cutting "Sympathy for the Devil"! They'd get theirs — but not until they'd given us ours. I went, so to speak, to the dock of the bay, and let the smoke out of my ears. I felt, through the grapevine, that people got to be free. Even if they might jump in your game occasionally. Check out the way the European party called the Prague Spring got broken up by the Warsaw Pact police.

It's all '68 to me since then. The longer I was home, the more I saw and thought the way the U.S. is run really wasn't that different from how the war was run.

As the country moved from love-ins to live-ins and from LSD to Prozac, I got my own personal Vietnam anniversary. I was born in Ohio, went to college in Northwestern Ohio. After exiting the Air Force, I was back there. Going to the same university on a downsized GI Bill. I was celebrating my birthday when Kent State went down. May 4, 1970, "four dead in Ohio . . ."

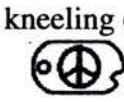
Naïve college anti-war protesters weren't always well-informed, well-behaved or pure in motive. But a campus shouldn't be a free fire zone. The Ohio National Guardsmen were in no danger. The nearest kid shot was 71 feet away. The furthest, 745 feet. Four KIA, 9 WIA. No weapons captured, no secondary explosions, no hootches destroyed. Poor After Action/BDA. We did better at My Lai.

Of course the fix goes in. Students — not Guardsmen — are indicted. The rumor mill gins up stories about the girls being whores and the guys being strung out druggies. Hippie, commie trash. Even the student just walking out of class when she was wasted. Nixon and Ohio's Governor, James Rhodes, throw their weight around and hem and haw.

Four years after the brave deed's done, eight Guardsmen are finally indicted; seven take the Fifth. None are convicted of anything nor pay damages. In fact, a judge dismisses all criminal charges. Nine years after the bloodletting, the state coughs up a whole $675,000 — to be split 13 ways — and a half-assed apology. Which the defendants and their attorneys dispute. That's $675K for the kid they put in a wheelchair, the other eight they shot up *and* the four KIA.

Yep, My Lai all over again. I know these people. By type if not personally. Same mentality, same motivation. Bring the war home, right? We're here and so is it. So are they. We have to fight differently now.

I wrote this poem, originally published in the journal Vietnam Generation, about the birthday present I got when I was 27: the image of that dark-haired screaming girl kneeling over a body.



HORACE COLEMAN IS A VETERAN, POET AND WRITER LIVING N CALIFORNIA.

Still Life With Dead Hippie

It's all in the point of view. Suppose you have your
sophored out sophomore slumped on the sidewalk
in the foreground. Never made it to the bar.
His buddy's embarrassed, his girl outraged.
No fun tonight, Hon!

Or, maybe this feminist witch is exercising her anger
on this newly stricken MCP (male chauvinist pig).
As the stunned bastard in bellbottoms looks for reasons.

It could be a pink-faced VC broad trying to grasp the life that's just flown
from your unfavorite dumb son. And,
she has no right to cry out in plain sight. To be so
full of pain. You have to blame her for the cluck's bad luck.

Of course, what it was, was these dirty, rotten,
vicious whore kids — standing around watching the
overarmed, undertrained National Guard about to go wild.
And, yeah, those kids were fools.
Some of them believing in democracy & free speech & other book stuff.
As if they belonged in the real world.
Out there chunking rocks & flowers & slogans & curses.
Full of dope, sex, & unAmerican anti-war ideas.
They were coming out of class, out of their stupor, sitting on & smoking grass.
Reminding you! something's wrong & someone has to do something.
So, it's their fault it's not their fault!

Then we find out: there were no snipers or
syphilitic commie call girls recruiting on campus.
And that one girl was just a terrified 14-year-old runaway.
Barely old enough to bleed but the right age to understand the deed.

And, did you ever notice how that cheap statue,
down there in Columbus, of that used car salesman
toting forged registrations past the Capitol building
looks just like Governor Rhodes?

"Spring Offensive" in the College Classroom

JOE MILLER

"My Dad never talks about it..."

"I think my folks were hippies, but I'm not sure what that means..."

"We just barely got through World War II in high school, let alone Vietnam..."

"I am in ROTC because I am interested in a military career, but what happened in Vietnam?"

Each Spring, since 1989, I teach an undergraduate political science course on "Politics and Policy in the Vietnam War" at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), which I call my "Spring Offensive." Above are samples of some of the statements I typically hear from the students in this class during our first self-introduction meeting. The course is offered in seminar style to increase student participation, though it is my impression that we could probably fill any size lecture hall, given the continued intensity of interest in the war and the era.

As a veteran of the war and a rank-and-file participant in the movement that helped to end it, I had long wished to teach a course on this topic. I always point out to the students at the start of the course that it is sort of a "mission" for me, my effort to convince young men and women not to blindly follow the direction of political and economic elites who may decide to take this country to war.

While the focus of the course is "political," or policy-oriented, and historical, I attempt to introduce a wide range of issues, such as the role of women, the war in literature and film, the historical role of the 1950s in producing the so-called "Vietnam Generation," and, certainly, the role of GIs and veterans in the movement against the war. Preparation for the course each year involves the unending search for that "perfect" set of textbooks or other materials that will get all my points across but will not break the students financially. So far, in the nine years I have taught the course, I have discovered very few books that cover it all effectively, except perhaps for Marilyn Young's "The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990" (1991). I also try to use memoirs when practicable, such as Bill Ehrhart's "Passing Time" (1995). Finally, a fine documentary collection is Marvin Gettleman, et al, "Vietnam and America" (1995). Such books, when used along with the wide range of videos available, can get the general points across, or at least be the basis of solid discussion in class. Discussion and debate are the key to developing a critical perspective on the war and the events surrounding it.

And the students? Who are they? Why do they join the course? What do they get from it? Further, what is the relevance of such a course to the work of VVAW?

Most of the students who have taken this course over the past nine years are the sons and daughters of those who lived through the Vietnam era, in and out of the war. What draws them to the course is the fact that, even now, high school history courses do not adequately cover this major period in their parents' lives. Furthermore, when Vietnam is "covered" in a day or a week, these students are still left with many unanswered questions about the war, the movement against it, and the era in general.

Many of these students have family members who served in the military during the war and who never talk about it with anyone. These young men and women have a deep desire to "connect" with this or that relative. You can see it in their eyes when they tell why they are in the class on the very first day. They know something is wrong, something has taken this relative's life in a certain direction, something having to do with the war. These young men and women want to know, want to understand, want to open a road to greater communication. They have an instinctual understanding that this will help in some significant way. And, as those of us who teach these courses already know, it does help — it may even save some lives. It helps everyone involved, including the teachers.

On a fairly regular basis I also get some ROTC students in this course, some looking for a military career, many more just looking for a way to finance today's rather expensive college education. It is interesting to watch how these particular students respond to the course content, which has included films such as "Hearts and Minds" and visiting speakers such as authors W.D. Ehrhart and Larry Heinemann, and Barry Romo of VVAW's National Office. For the most part, they just sit and listen, offering a comment now and then. There have been cases, however, where the course has completely turned some of them around. There was the Air Force ROTC senior cadet a few years back who actually quit the program as a direct result of what he learned in this course, information and analysis that was never presented to him by his "military science" teachers. This also opened up communication between him and his uncle, a Vietnam vet who was not happy about his nephew's possible military career, but who never felt comfortable about talking over Vietnam experiences. We in VVAW always talk about such instances as denying the war machine its cannon fodder, and this is certainly a part of my "mission" in teaching the course.

A final element that needs to be understood in relation to teaching about Vietnam has to do with a new sense of social activism that is apparent among young people today. The usual mythology about so-called "Generation X" — the apathetic, the uncaring — does not wash with the students I have been teaching over the past four or five years. We are witnessing, I believe, a new rise in activist sensibilities and impulses, and many of these young people are looking to lessons from the 1960s, good and bad, from which to take some direction. The students in my Vietnam class are always excited to learn of VVAW, its history and its continuing activism thirty years on. This has allowed VVAW to reach new pockets of young activists, to pass on our experiences and our skills, to continue our work alongside the social activism and the daily struggles of succeeding generations.

Thus, we all need to understand that "teaching the Vietnam War," whether through a formal course or the occasional class visit, should not be merely understood as an academic exercise, a review of historical "facts." Those of us who continue to be social justice activists in and through VVAW, and who have the opportunity to reach these young minds, also have the responsibility to refrain from feeding into cynicism and to present a positive and accurate picture of our own activist histories. In the classroom or in the streets, we should all be about "teaching the Vietnam War."

JOE MILLER IS AN ADJUNCT ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS.

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A Call To Witness

A Review by Ben Chitty

***Hell, Healing and Resistance: Veterans Speak*, by Daniel Hallock (Plough, 1998)**

For some folks a book like this is just same-old same-old; for others it may be a blast from the past, maybe even a little quaint. Dan Hallock's "Hell, Healing, and Resistance" is all of this, and much more.

Brother Hallock, a member of the Bruderhof Community and an ROTC veteran, has dredged up our old horrors, presented them anew, and added some more from earlier and later wars. Compiling reports and testimony of veterans and survivors of wars, his collection is not so much analytic or methodically systematic as poignant — it cuts like a knife. His book was completed before the latest Tailwind and Ranch Hand allegations, but even for some older controversies — Vietnam veterans' suicide rates and the "yellow rain" allegations of Communist chemical warfare in Laos and Cambodia — Hallock does not try to settle the issues. Controversy is beside the point: the veterans and survivors know what they know and say what they say, and Hallock's research serves mainly to put the testimony into context. His real interest is elsewhere.

Hallock is a pacifist. He's not so much interested in the rights and wrongs of any particular war but the costs of any war, and especially for its participants. He began his project after meeting some incarcerated veterans; throughout he concentrates on what participation does to the people who came back from war. This is far from an indulgence in morbid fascination or vicarious (and cheap) thrills. He has a dual agenda, and the testimonies serve both.

Hallock believes the experience of war has marked us in a way which makes us especially valuable to the people among whom we have come home to try to live. His book is a call to witness, an urgent invitation to veterans and other survivors of war to tell what we learned from the experience. He hopes that the tales will teach our civilian brothers and sisters, daughters and sons, what war means, and why (if not how) the youngest generation of war veterans should be the last.

He also expects the telling to be therapeutic. Most of us can remember how hard it was to speak of war, how little we wanted to talk about it, except among ourselves. Little knowing what we had done or who we had become, how could we explain ourselves to anyone else? If he is right, what we have to do is try, and try again. Many of the veterans in this book are certainly speaking for the first time.

So far I doubt many VVAW folks would disagree. But Hallock is a Christian, and his diagnosis is spiritual. He believes that telling confesses guilt and brings forgiveness, and leads to peace. For him and for other veterans this is a life of brotherhood in a Christian community. I would not deny him or anyone the solace of such a journey's end.

Even so, the question of individual guilt is tough. Most of us never killed anyone "up close and personal" so to speak. Many never fired a gun. How are we guilty of anything, at least of anything worse than following orders?

"Baby-killer" is the epithet most of us seem to recall. Some veterans deny the charge, an astonishing feat of denial in itself. We shot at half-seen movements, raked hills and valleys with explosive ordnance, salted the ground with mines, and poisoned the earth with dioxin. We made it happen. Babies died. Someone killed them. Who but us?

Maybe that's Hallock's point. Check it out.

Ben Chitty is VVAW's East Coast Regional Coordinator.

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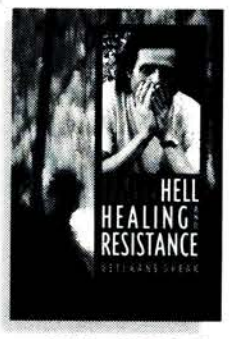

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Working and Partying, VVAW-style

Barry Romo

We still had more meals to go. Seven hundred homeless vets were fed, as well as several hundred support staff. VVAW members were running the kitchen as usual, and it was 106 degrees outside with the heat index; the kitchen was even hotter. A homeless veteran looked into the kitchen, calling us to "ATTENTION!" He demanded to know why we were smiling while scrubbing pots and pans. His face softened, his voice softened, then he smiled and said, "I want you to know that I really appreciate what you're doing. Thanks."

Twenty-one VVAW members from the National Office and the Chicago and Champaign-Urbana chapters assembled for the fifth year in a row to run the kitchen at this summer's Homeless Standdown. The VA workers who run these standdowns had already given us an award, taken us out to dinner, and said, "We could not do it without you." High praise indeed from some pretty selfless workers. They put in twice as much time as anyone feeding, clothing, and providing benefits and medical care to these folks who are part of the unseen social cost of U.S. warmaking.

Work and action have always defined VVAW, more than resolutions and petitions. VVAW participants at this year's Standdown were Vietnam vets, Grenada vets, Gulf War vets, and UN peacekeeping forces. This even included one young brother, John, who had just refused a commission in the Marines at Quantico.

John had already been in the Corps for two years, when he graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in May 1998. He had every intention of becoming a Marine officer after he obtained his college degree. But VVAW, in the persons of Bill Ehrhart, Joe Miller and myself, kind of got in the way.

John was a student in Joe's course on the Vietnam war this past Spring. This gave him an opportunity to attend two weeks' worth of Bill Ehrhart events, as Bill was a Guest-in-Residence at the University during this period. Bill kept asking John why he thought he wanted to be an officer in the Corps. Who did he think he would be "defending"? John didn't stop coming to these events. He told Joe he felt he was testing himself. I asked John similar questions and provided similar challenges. For fifteen weeks in the Vietnam class, John read and listened and even spoke out about his plan to become a Marine officer upon graduation. We thought we had "lost" him.

One week before the Standdown, Joe received a phone call from John. He had just returned from his final training at Quantico. He told Joe that during training everything Bill and I had said to him kept whirling through his head. John could not accept the commission. His original view of possibly remaining insulated from the dehumanizing aspects of military life was challenged by his training experiences. When Joe told him about the Standdown, John said, "I'll be there." And he was.

(As a side note, it was interesting to watch these younger vets eyeing the "duck hunters." You know, those 50-year-old men in Persian Gulf fatigues with stomachs the size of Mount Rushmore, with buttons and pins covering their hats and bodies proclaiming themselves to be "tunnel rats," "commandos," "Special Forces Rangers," and so on. You get the picture.)

It was truly gratifying to see that these young vets both confided in us and saw us as their brothers and sisters. VVAW was also joined by two carloads of students who drove up two and a half hours from Champaign-Urbana. They've been active in the movement to oppose the racist mascot at the University of Illinois, and have attended seminars and classes with VVAW. In addition, my 16-year-old daughter and two of her friends put in a solid ten-hour day, making six hundred box lunches, washing tons of fruit, and serving on the chow line.

Toward the end of the final day, one of the big'uns from VVA came over to talk with me. A little under the weather (a half gallon of bloody marys will do that to you), and twice my size, he said, "We're not supposed to get along. That's what they tell me. I might not like your politics, but I love you guys." Then he nearly squeezed the life out of me with a huge bear hug.

The following weekend, the July 4 campout in Central Illinois seemed like a continuation of the standdown in many ways. Here again, VVAW members, including two Gulf War vets, were joined by young social justice activists from the University of Illinois. Most of us didn't camp in tents, however. There's a large converted barn with hardwood floors, screens, fans, and a fridge. The campout, in fact, was more like a slumber party, since we stayed up all night, eating, drinking, singing, joking, talking politics, and finally sleeping in the barn.

Working together and partying together. Helping our fellow vets of all eras, and having good politics. That's what makes VVAW different from the rest. That's why we have younger people joining. And that's why VVAW has to keep on truckin'.

Barry Romo is a VVAW national coordinator.

Summer '98 Homeless Standdown

Brooke Anderson

Student activists of the Progressive Resource/Action Cooperative (PRC) in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois have benefited over the years from the leadership and friendship of VVAW members. Veteran activists have provided leadership development, security training, historical perspective, advice, and inspiration to the next generation of activists working on issues of social justice. This year, we students thought we would give a little bit back and join VVAW members in volunteering at the 1998 Summer Standdown for homeless veterans.

On July 25 we traveled to the Humboldt Park National Guard Armory in Chicago for our first ever Standdown, a biannual event sponsored by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Many diverse activist and service organizations as well as government and private agencies come together to provide food and assistance to homeless veterans in the Chicago area. The Summer Standdown crew fed over 850 homeless veterans; handed out clothing and supplies; provided information about housing, employment, and benefits; gave haircuts; fitted eyeglasses; and much more.

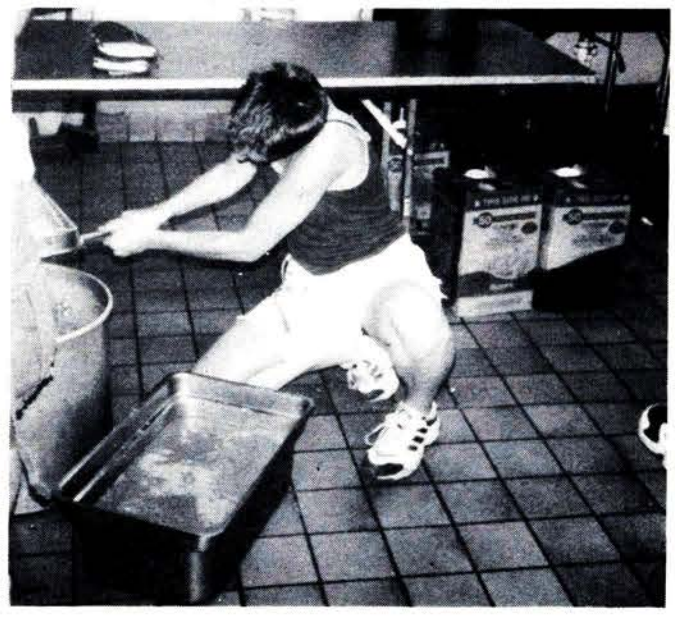
Together, VVAW and PRC volunteers devoted themselves to cleaning the kitchen, carrying supplies, and serving food and drink. As Rose Stremlau, a PRC student activist, commented:

"The Standdown shocked me. I wasn't surprised to see the diversity of veterans in need, but I was surprised by both the diversity of services offered and by the wide spectrum of organizations which worked together to provide these services. It isn't too often that I would listen to a grumpy man in a POW/MIA shirt and fatigues tell me how to pour apple juice and almost have a good time doing it, knowing that I was part of a greater collaborative effort."

Despite the 100+ degree weather outside (and probably twice that in the kitchen), energy, commitment, and smiles abounded the whole day through. Hank Emerle, a UIUC student activist, remarked:

"The Standdown was an incredible opportunity for me to be an active participant in an event geared not only at satisfying the immediate needs of a marginalized segment of society, but also empowering these very same people to take action on their own behalf. Not often does one get a chance to make a difference in someone's life on multiple levels at once. This two-pronged attack on social injustice is to me a model for active change in society that can be applied in many different ways. I am glad that I could be a part of an event such as this."

Brooke Anderson is a junior at the University of Illinois. She currently works with the Progressive Resource/Action Cooperative in the struggle to eliminate "Chief Illiniwek" as the racist mascot and symbol of the University.



Social Justice Activism: No Generational Boundaries

BROOKE ANDERSON

Speech delivered at VVAW Veterans Day Event in Chicago November 11, 1998

Good morning. My name is Brooke Anderson. I am a 19-year-old junior at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Born more than a decade after the founding of VVAW, I'm somewhat disadvantaged with respect to being able to speak about veterans' issues. But what I do know is that my life, and the lives of many of my fellow student activists, have been profoundly and forever changed by the friendship and leadership of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. It is about this relationship between VVAW and student activism that I will speak to today.

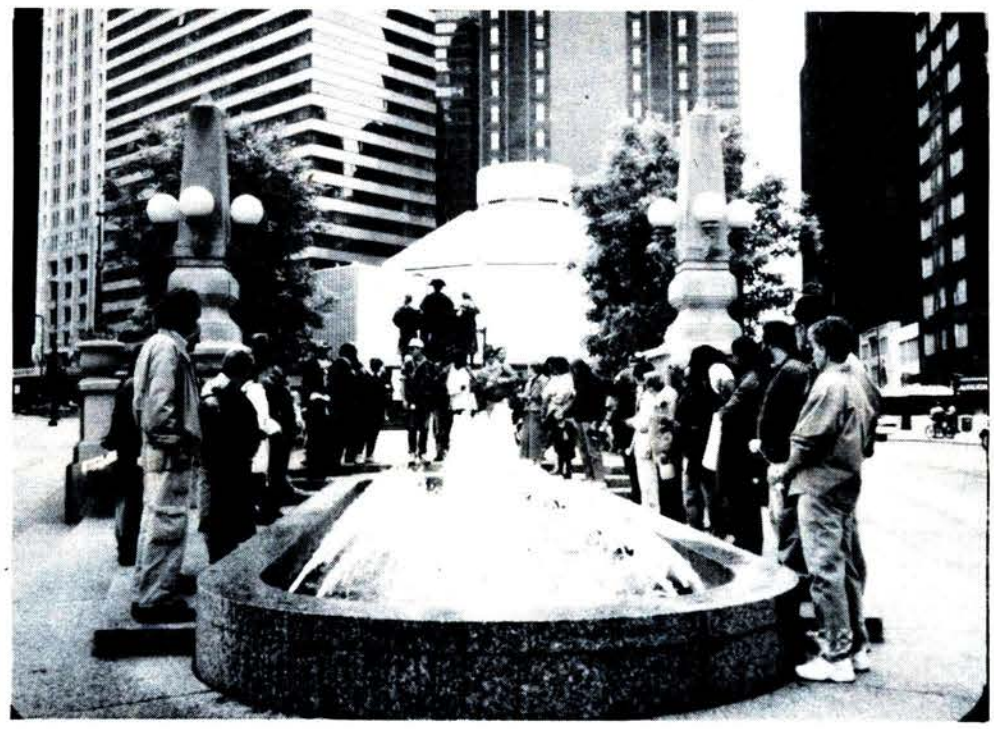
I was introduced to VVAW through my work with the Progressive Resource/ Action Cooperative (PRC) — a multi-issue, multi-tactical activist organization in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois working for peace with justice, and currently spearheading the movement to eliminate "Chief Illiniwek" as the racist mascot and logo of the University of Illinois.

Through working with the PRC, I became acquainted with several VVAW members that I now consider my dear friends: Jim Holiman, Joe Miller, Jeff Machota, Claudia Lennhoff, Lisa Dixon, and later Barry Romo and Bill Branson who dedicated countless hours to training security volunteers for the numerous demonstrations and marches we have every year as well as for the national Conference on the Elimination of Racist Mascots (CERM) we hosted in April.

Since then, student activists have attended the VVAW regional and national meetings, volunteered at the Summer 1998 Homeless Standdown, camped out with vets and friends this summer and fall, attended various VVAW parties, and contributed to the VVAW paper, ***The Veteran***.

In all the time we've spent together, storytelling has become an important activity. Listening to the stories of veterans and their allies, their pain is sometimes tangible and one cannot but experience it as one's own. It can be a healthy pain though, like that of a hand or a foot to which blood is returning after having fallen asleep, a signal that something is wrong, that action is needed. But accompanying this pain is often confusion: a disturbance of, and challenge to, a once-coherent and comforting world view, now seething with hypocrisy and contradiction as we realize that the economic, social, and political systems that created the Vietnam War still exist today.

The U.S. government continues to brutally crush liberation movements in other countries and within our own. It denies the right to self-determination and supports dictatorial regimes, even providing arms, economic aid, and military training to such regimes. It ravages the environment, and with it, often the only means of subsistence for many indigenous populations. This same government of ours creates and perpetuates an environment in which women are raped and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered are beaten. Meanwhile, our leaders and our heroes waste away as political prisoners in maximum security prisons. Moreover, it lets its veterans starve and freeze on the streets, go without proper medical care, and fail to adequately provide for their families.



VVAW Memorial Day Event in Chicago, 1998

At 19, I've still got a lot of growing up to do, but if I have anything to do with it, I'm not going to grow up in such a world without trying to change the domestic social, political and economic institutions that perpetuate war. Why?

As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny." Recognizing such interdependence of oppressions, the student movement and the veterans' movement have much to learn from each other and much to struggle for together.

Over the past year, I've seen a kind of cross-pollination between the student and veterans' movements. VVAW has provided leadership, friendship, historical perspective, advice, and inspiration to the next generation of student activists — most of this over beer, no less! VVAW leaders have brought out the best in student activists by simply refusing to see anything but the best in us. As Nelson Mandela said, "As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people the permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." In return, students have contributed to VVAW a contagious energy and vitality. Together we have reaffirmed our commitment, our vision, and our sense of community within our respective movements.

As students, we recognize that universities are not autonomous institutions, but rather serve the interests of capitalist, racist, sexist, heterocentric military-industrial complex we call the United States of America. Even worse, rationales for maintaining such an order are created within these universities — within our own political science (except Joe's!), philosophy and history classes. Therefore, if we students are to effect change within the university system, we must also engage in struggle to fundamentally alter society at large.

To do this we need to nurture a collective memory of resistance movements, their successes and mistakes, and also of their state suppression. The way in which Vietnam is remembered will in part determine the way in which my generation and generations to come will react to war, and hopefully resist it with everything we've got.

This is especially important because those individuals and institutions responsible for war and injustice are trying to get us to forget about something that, if we remembered, would get them in some serious trouble. Let me repeat that: your government, our government, is trying to get us to forget something — the real history and lessons of the Vietnam War and the lies they told about it. They're trying to get us to forget the lessons of the anti-war movement, the history of resistance within the United States and the world over, of people struggling to be free. We're supposed to forget this rich history of resistance because they know that if we remember, then we will ensure that there will never be another Vietnam War, there will never be another Wounded Knee, there will never be another Counter Intelligence Program, there will never be another Gulf War — not if we can help it!

We have a right to be free, to be educated, to do meaningful work, to have decent health and child care. We have a right to sexual equality, to love whomever and however we choose, to leave a healthy planet for our children. We have a right to demand justice, to demand that our histories not be rewritten and revised by those who murdered for profit.

In the age of globalization, it

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War: The Same Old Solution in Colombia?

ALYNNE ROMO

Speech delivered at VVAW Veterans Day Event in Chicago November 11, 1998

Maybe it's the changing role of the state in the era of globalization that explains the inconsistencies and incoherencies in the fiasco widely referred to as the "war on drugs".

In over a decade, the policy has not worked. The U.S. has poured millions into counternarcotics in Colombia with no change in the amount of cocaine arriving in the States. The main differences are that now we get better coke, and we get 60% of our heroin from Colombia too.

The fact that our aid is really being used for counterinsurgency is finally coming out in the open. As though to justify that revelation, the U.S. media has been reporting that 40-50% of Colombia's national territory is under guerrilla control, and U.S. defense intelligence reports a possible guerrilla victory within five years.

While guerrillas do exist throughout Colombia, by no means do they control the countryside. Guerrilla forces number no greater than they did decades ago, and, while the military has not eliminated the guerrilla threat, paramilitary death squads have dislodged the guerrillas from their traditional strongholds in Uraba and at the southern front. In fact, the entire zone south of Panama from the Pacific to the Caribbean is now depopulated and is under the control of paramilitary units. Death squads have begun incursions down the Magdelena river corridor, which slices north through the middle of Colombia.

Some elements in our government try to tie guerrillas to the "narcotics threat," and, while it is true that some guerrillas work with drugs, so do the military and the paramilitary. The U.S. has simply chosen to back the forces of reaction in the internal war.

Over 100 paramilitary groups operate in Colombia, including some using helicopter gunships. Eighty-four percent of the 185 politically motivated massacres in 1997 were committed by paramilitary squads. In 1988, a trend toward pre-announced massacres emerged in which a death squad arrives in a village, makes its presence known through graffiti, threats and "black lists," and then a massacre ensues. Some 65 towns are currently under pre-announced massacre watches.

Paramilitary allies include traffickers, military and business interests. Coca-Cola workers have been killed by Colombian death squads. Goodyear workers were attacked by the self-named "Death to Trade Unionists" death squad. And British Petroleum is still under investigation for its murky links to sinister events.

Of about 300 trade unionists killed worldwide last year for organizing for their rights, over half were Colombian. This has been a decade-long trend. The 61 teachers assassinated in 1997 brought their total to 400 murdered in five years. CUT, the largest labor federation, has had 2,300 members assassinated since it was founded in 1986.

Chaos reigns in this war-torn land. Drug traffickers own over 40% of arable land. Over one million people are internally displaced. The war-weary Colombians voted overwhelmingly for a non-binding peace referendum, but the U.S. has opposed the peace plan.

Is U.S. policy accidentally inept? We know it's racist, brutal and ineffective. Our so-called "drug policy" has destabilized communities here and in Colombia.

For what reasons? Because of plans for the new canal with accompanying roads, pipelines and train tracks that will connect everything from the never-complete Pan-American Highway. to the Caribbean to the Pacific Ocean? Since Colombia is now second to Venezuela in South American oil production? Is it a militarily strategic site because of its access to the interior of the continent and proximity to vital shipping lanes?

Some in our government say, off the record, that our policy toward Colombia resembles that toward El Salvador: the U.S. wants to strengthen the military in order for it to be strong enough to negotiate peace. The head of the Southern Command, General Wilhelm, complains that the Colombian military is deficient in direct attack capabilities, night operations, communications systems, intelligence systems, the ability to operate on rivers and coasts, and the ability to sustain their forces once committed.

We would assert that the Colombian military's problem is its proximity to paramilitary death squads, its own impunity, and its terrible human rights record. Colombia has had 10,000 graduates from the School of the Americas — a larger number than that of any other country.

Drug czar General McCafferty says the guerrillas are no longer motivated by ideology — that they have just become common criminals. Interestingly, Marxist guerrillas weren't connected to Colombia's drugs until U.S.-sponsored eradication efforts in Peru fueled peasant growers to set up shop in Colombia. Guerrillas began taxing crops to sponsor their side of the war effort. If McCafferty's propaganda is true, the U.S. is fighting a foe that exists solely due to U.S. drug policy.

If McCafferty is lost as to the location of the criminal elements — and there is no reason he should be, as drug links to Colombian business and government institutions were well documented long ago — the recent bust in Florida should give him a clue. U.S. customs agents found 1,600 pounds of cocaine on a Colombian Air Force cargo plane that had arrived to pick up "logistical" material. Air Force chief General Manuel Sandoval resigned, admitting that "there are people dedicated to drug trafficking within the [military] institution." Just a week earlier, three Colombian officials were sentenced for smuggling heroin into the U.S. on then-President Samper's plane when the president traveled here to deliver an anti-drug speech to the United Nations.

Whatever the excuse, the U.S. is already on the slippery slope of increased involvement in Colombia. In 1997, we provided $272 million for development assistance to the whole of Latin America and sent $100 million to Colombian security forces. Colombia's new president has received $280 million in new aid from the U.S. — most of it for "anti-drug" efforts.

On any given day, there are 130-250 U.S. personnel in Colombia (who have been declared a military target by the guerrillas) apart from those permanently stationed in the country. A hundred U.S. civilians are employed by Dancorp and East Inc., which conduct aerial defoliant spraying. According to the Dallas Morning News, the Clinton administration has launched a multimillion-dollar covert program employing mercenaries, private contractors and active-duty personnel to support the armed forces. The Clinton administration hired retired Green Berets, Gulf War veterans, and even a few figures from Central American covert operations backed by the CIA in the 1980s.

There is little indication that anyone in the Clinton administration is able to recognize the destruction in the lives of the people of Colombia wrought by U.S. policy. And while some — even in the business community — have questioned our policies, the dominant voices in our government sadly continue to rely on the same old solution: war.

ALYNNE ROMO WORKS WITH THE COLOMBIA SUPPORT NETWORK AND HELPS RUN THE NEW WORLD RESOURCE CENTER IN CHICAGO.

Sources: ***Colombia Bulletin****; "Waging War: U.S. Policy Toward Colombia," presented by Colletta Youngers to the Latin America Studies Association; "U.S. Turns to Covert Action in Colombia" by the Resource Center of The Americas.*

For more information:

Colombia Support Network: http://www.igc.apc.org/csn/

Colombia Bulletin **:** c/o CSN, PO Box 1505, Madison, WI 53701 ($25/yr)

Colombia Labor Monitor: clm@prairienet.org

U.S. Committee on Refugees: 1-800-307-4712

Golombia Human Rights Network: colhrc@igc.apc.org

Iraqi Children and U.S. Veterans: Victims of U.S. Policy

Jeff Stack

In July, I traveled to Iraq with four other American citizens in a delegation coordinated by Voices in the Wilderness, a pacifist organization calling for an end to sanctions and for what they see as United States accountability for government actions. We learned much about an issue seldom discussed in the U.S. media: depleted uranium and its dire effects on Iraqis as well as U.S. and other Persian Gulf war veterans. We went there to better understand the human impact of war and the sanctions, policies theoretically meant to undermine the government of Saddam Hussein but which have victimized the Iraqi people.

A 10-year-old girl stood among 140 children to receive her first communion at St. George's Chaldean Catholic Church in Baghdad, Iraq. About an hour into the service, the girl, unable to join her peers walking to the altar, slumped onto the church bench. A nun quickly came to her assistance. We later learned the girl had not eaten in two days. She is one of four siblings in a desperately poor family able to provide just a single meal to each child every fourth day. It was not yet her turn to eat.

For so many Iraqis, a time of sustenance never arrives. At least one million Iraqis, most of them children, died between 1990 and 1995 due to a lack of adequate food, medicine and other humanitarian supplies denied through United States-backed, UN-imposed sanctions, according to UNICEF. In April, the agency updated the casualty report, noting 90,000 Iraqis (mostly children) have died annually, with an Iraqi child under the age of five dying every 12 minutes due to the continued embargo. Sanctions, a continually detonating, quiet-killing weapon of mass destruction — monstrous in comparison to Hussein's scrawny war machine — are on a par with other atrocities committed in the post World War II era in Rwanda, Bosnia, Indonesia/East Timor and Indochina. It is time for United States and UN leaders to end this butchery by neglect.

Hussein indeed is a brutal, ruthless despot, responsible for killing tens of thousands of his own people. Nonetheless, the U.S. government for years considered him an ally of sorts, supplying him, for instance, with reconnaissance information and weapons in their eight-year war with Iran. Uncle Sam sold weapons to both sides for profit, helping each side destabilize and destroy the other — each country lost at least one million people. U.S. corporations, with the blessings of the Commerce and State departments, also sold Iraq most of the biological weapons now referred to by our government officials in their justification of continuing, crushing sanctions.

So these are our enemies? Four girls in Basrah.

We saw pre-teenagers selling American cigarettes to earn enough money for food for themselves and their families. Scores of children and elders resorted to begging and combing through trash heaps for food, realities locals insist were unheard of in the 1980s -- when they say oil revenue provided the masses with opportunities for affordable housing, free medical care, free education through college, and relative prosperity. Then came the sanctions begun in 1990, and the Gulf War with its cross-generational effects from weapons like those made from depleted uranium (DU).

Primarily U.S. fighter jets and tanks fired nearly a million DU-tipped armor-piercing artillery shells and missiles upon Iraqi targets, contaminating their own troops, millions of Iraqis and the environment, especially in southern Iraq. In November 1991, the ***London Independent*** published a leaked report, prepared by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, which warned the radioactive debris left from the DU-tipped weapons could cause 500,000 deaths. That horrific projection may be a gross underestimation since it was based on the assumption that 40 tons of DU remained in Iraq. Pentagon officials have since suggested more than 300 tons of the debris — radioactive for four and a half billion years — were left across the country after the war.

A UN report, based on Iraqi government figures and leaked to the Reuters News Service in June, notes cancer rates nationwide increased by 52 percent from 1988 to 1994 and more than doubled in Basrah. There have also been dramatic increases in congenital birth defects and spontaneous abortions reported in hospitals since 1991, according to Red Crescent/Red Cross officials we spoke with in Iraq.

More than 90,000 U.S. veterans are affected by the so-called Gulf War Syndrome and its symptoms of chronic fatigue, gastrointestinal distress, memory loss, chronic headache and joint pain. The Pentagon refuses to acknowledge the strong likelihood that many, perhaps most, of those vets, left unprotected and exposed to DU, are suffering from radiation poisoning — apparently to avoid paying out massive combat injury claims and to minimize negative attention to one of their prized weapons.

A 1995 DU report from the Army's Environmental Polecat Institute (AEPI) notes that when a DU projectile strikes a hard surface, like a tank, up to 70% of the penetrator is aerosolized and scattered as small particles in, on and around the target. "These uranium particles can be ingested or inhaled and are toxic," according to a fact sheet issued in 1993 by the Army Armament, Munitions and Chemical Command (ARMCC).

The military, though well aware of DU's toxicity, still refrained from alerting Coalition forces venturing onto DU-ravaged battlefields. In one survey of more than 10,000 Gulf vets reported in the book, 82% indicated that they had entered Iraqi vehicles after the war. It was not until March 7, 1991, after most of the fighting had subsided, that the ARMCC finally sent a message warning commanders that any system struck by DU penetrators should be assumed contaminated and that any personnel entering such systems should wash any exposed body parts and discard their clothing.

In March 1994, reports on some 250 families of veterans of the Gulf War living in Mississippi were published in the United States. Sixty-seven percent of the children of these families were born with congenital deformities: their eyes, ears or fingers are missing or they are suffering from severe blood diseases and respiratory problems. These are among the same ailments plaguing thousands of Iraqi children. It is imperative that international health agencies examine the affected Iraqis and their contaminated environment and that the United States and other Coalition nations pay for needed medical treatment and environmental clean-up (if it is in fact possible). The Veterans Administration should also begin "in vivo" (internal) monitoring of afflicted Gulf veterans, along with urinalysis, to determine accurately the amount of DU that may have been internalized by their bodies.

There seems to be little physicians can do to treat the hundreds of children we saw suffering in Iraqi hospitals. If hunger doesn't kill them, they often fall victim to once-rare opportunistic diseases contracted by drinking contaminated water. Many towns still have no potable supply of

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The 1998 School of the Americas Vigil: Finding the Bottom Line

JACKSON H. DAY

The United States Army School of the Americas (SOA) at Fort Benning, Georgia, trains soldiers from Latin American countries. Many of them have been accused of committing atrocities — rape, torture, disappearances, killing — after their return. The School of the Americas has been accused of having manuals that teach torture in its curriculum. Its Hall of Fame includes graduates who have come to power through coups and death squads. Among its guest instructors are a number who came to instruct after they were known for involvement in atrocities. Hence for a decade there has been a growing movement calling for its closure, SOA Watch, which conducts an annual vigil on the anniversary of the murder of six Jesuit priests in El Salvador by School of the Americas graduates.

This year's vigil took place Saturday and Sunday, November 21 and 22. Challenged by a fellow Vietnam veteran to seek out both sides, I went early to spend Friday afternoon at the School of the Americas itself and hear another side. The atrocities were terrible but the result of a few graduates for whom the SOA could be no more responsible than Harvard need take responsibility for the Unabomber. The manuals in question were sent over to the SOA to be translated into Spanish, and the translators came in horror to the faculty, who agreed that such things should not be taught at the SOA, and they aren't. Selections for the Hall of Fame were made not by the SOA but by U. S. ambassadors in the respective countries. The school teaches democracy and things would be ever so much worse in Latin America without it. The SOA faculty talking to me were nice people and one would like to believe them.

The focal point of the weekend was to be "crossing the line" on Sunday, becoming guilty of "criminal trespassing" by stepping onto Fort Benning as part of a protest. While first offenders might expect only a "bar and ban" letter prohibiting re-entry onto Fort Benning for five years, second offenders in the past had received six-month jail sentences and $3,000 fines. I had flown to Fort Benning undecided as to whether to cross. Saturday, hearing powerful speeches but knowing such speeches were not persuasive to those who had spoken to me at the SOA, did not help resolve the issue. It was hard to imagine the SOA chaplain teaching torture or the young policewoman from Colombia leading a massacre.

With the new day on Sunday came the necessary clarity. To cross the line was to join a memorial procession, with caskets and crosses and pictures, and each represented a human being by name who was dead, and in one way or another, SOA graduates were involved in those deaths. Theories could be argued, and facts disputed, but one thing was absolutely certain: each name was the name of someone who was dead, someone who would have had a whole life in front of them if they had not been killed. At that moment, the issue for me was not about breaking the law, or about risking arrest, or about crossing a line painted on the road to mark a border; it was not even about which friends I would agree with and which I would disagree with; it was not even about closing the SOA. It was about whether I would stand with those who had been killed, or turn my back on them. There was the bottom line.

Those of us who were to cross were given crosses or pictures of the dead to carry. I received and carried a picture of a young man, inscribed on the back, Antonio Maria Barrera. I do not know Antonio; I know nothing about him except that he was killed and somehow the SOA was implicated.

At 11 a.m., led by coffins for the six Jesuit priests and four female church workers raped and killed in El Salvador and small ones for the children massacred at El Mozote, I entered Fort Benning for Antonio Maria Barrera. The School of the Americas Watch had called for 5,000 to demonstrate and 1,000 to cross the line. As it turned out, over 7,000 came to the vigil and 2,319 crossed the line. Up the hill in an almost endless column of fours, and around a corner, out of sight of the vigilers outside the Fort Benning gate, awaited buses. The column stopped. Police took the caskets, the crosses, the pictures. We were divided into groups of 44 and put onto the buses. We understood that the buses would take us to processing centers where we would be formally charged and then, hours later, after interminable paperwork, those of us who were first-time offenders would be let go.

The long convoy of buses set forth deeper into Fort Benning, then at the first intersection made a right turn off the post, and a mile later turned into a ballpark and stopped. After a little wait, people got off the first bus. Some came running down the line of buses saying we were not going to be charged. Soon everyone exited the other buses. There was a feeling of intense euphoria. We had stared the Army in the eye, and the Army had blinked. We re-formed into a column of fours and began walking the mile and a half back through civilian communities to the Fort Benning front gate where the other vigilers waited with cheers to greet those of us who were returning. There were so many of us the Army simply had not had the resources to process us all.

On the 6 p.m. news, the Army explained to the world that most of us in the procession were well-meaning people who had been misled by the protest leaders, and therefore they had decided to make no arrests. But the Army never attempted to explain the names on the crosses. They never tried to explain why Antonio Maria Barrera is dead.

JACKSON DAY IS A MEMBER OF VVAW AND WAS AN ARMY CHAPLAIN IN VIETNAM FROM 1968-1969.

Iraqi Children and US Veterans: Victims of US Policy

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water since chlorine and spare parts to repair purification plants damaged by Coalition bombing are denied by sanctions. Many basic medical items are scarce or unavailable, including medicine, bed sheets (which patient families have to supply), IV tubes, syringes (often reused), soaps and autoclaves for sterilizing equipment, according to hospital administrators and doctors. Only emergency surgeries are performed due to a lack of anesthesia.

Please contact the White House at (202) 456-1111. Urge President Clinton to insist that the Security Council drops the economic sanctions against the Iraqi people and to initiate a comprehensive study determining the impact of DU weapons upon Iraqis and U.S. veterans, along with providing financial compensation to those afflicted.

JEFF STACK IS AN INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST AND PEACE & ANTI-DEATH PENALTY ACTIVIST BASED IN COLUMBIA, MISSOURI.

For more information on the sanctions:
Voices in the Wilderness
(223) 784-8065

For information on depleted uranium:
National Gulf War Resource Center
(202) 628-2700
charles@gulfwar.org
http://www.gulfwar.org/resource_center

"Metal of Dishonor: How Depleted Uranium Penetrates Steel, Radiates People and Contaminates the Environment," by Ramsey Clark, Helen Caldicott, Michio Kaku and Jay Gould (1997, International Action Center)

Debunking A Myth

A Review by John Zutz

***The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam*, by Jerry Lembcke (New York University Press, 1998)**

Many Vietnam veterans repeat a common litany: anti-war protesters spit upon them. This book attempts to debunk what Lembcke concludes has become a modern urban myth.

How does one attempt to prove a negative — that something didn't happen? This author does it by examining the positive side and failing to find any conclusive proof that it occurred. Along the way he finds many indications that it is indeed a myth.

His research examined newspapers from New York and San Francisco, as well as police reports detailing the interaction between protesters and veterans. No spitting incidents were reported, and the observers noticed that over time the veterans assumed leadership positions among the protesters. Lembcke did find newspaper reports of spitting during demonstrations in the late 1960s, but they referred to hawks spitting on anti-war protesters.

Reinforcing his myth hypothesis, Lembcke cites a Harris poll reported to Congress in 1972 that indicates 93% of returning veterans found their homecoming friendly, while only 3% found it unfriendly. The poll also reported that over 75% of returning vets were opposed to the war.

The first documented reports of being spit upon don't begin to appear until the early 1980s. According to the author, who is currently an associate professor of sociology, the time delay is a strong indication that the story is a myth. So where did the myth come from?

No spitting incidents were reported, and the observers noticed that over time the veterans assumed leadership positions among the protesters.

First, remember that we lost the war. There are historical examples of mistreatment myths in which the abusers are said to be traitors to the national cause. In post-WWI Germany, the Fascists exploited similar rumors to arouse popular anger toward Jews, homosexuals, and women. After France's defeat in Indochina, the contrast and conflict of the male warrior image with the more feminine factors of society were blamed for the defeat.

Second, right after the Vietnam War, the U.S. economy went into the tank. The working-class boys and girls who had served were hit the hardest by the lack of jobs combined with inflation. When they lost their jobs they began to doubt their worth.

Perhaps most important in producing the myth were political machinations. The image of the Vietnam vet in the early 1970s was strongly anti-war. There is no place in the American memory for the factually accurate image of vets throwing their medals back at Congress. This image had to be changed if the United States ever wanted to go to war again.

The image began changing when Nixon lost popular support for the war. He created the notion that society should support the war because the troops were there: we needed to keep fighting to bring the POWs home. The anti-war veteran image was changed further when the Nixon administration alluded that anti-war vets were effeminate and mentally suspect. This attitude was bolstered by popular film images of Post-Vietnam Syndrome (later Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD).

The Bush administration used the idea that Vietnam vets had met with malevolence to rally support for the Gulf War, arguing that opposition to the war was tantamount to disregard for the troops' well-being. By the time the bombing began, the troops' presence in the Gulf became the reason for the fighting.

Though no definitive proof can be produced to absolve activists, or to confirm their innocence, one can examine existing records and determine that, with the lack of positive proof and in the face of other events, it is unlikely any spitting occurred.

The author, who served in Vietnam and joined VVAW on his return, comments that on announcing that he was exposing the myth he was met by two reactions, "Myth, hell, it happened," or "It's about time." Personally, I'm glad he did.

John Zutz is a member of the Milwaukee chapter and a former VVAW regional coordinator.

United States Resists International Criminal Court

Carl Nyberg

In July 1998, in Rome, the nations of the world negotiated a permanent International Criminal Court (ICC) to try cases of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The treaty was approved by a vote of 120-7.

The United States, as represented by the Clinton/Gore administration, voted against the treaty. The United States would not support the treaty without the United States having the power to block prosecution of any case.

Past courts have been created for specific situations, like the Nuremberg tribunal, and the tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. These tribunals only had jurisdiction over specific times and regions. But many of humanity's most notorious criminals have avoided prosecution.

The ICC assumes jurisdiction when local authorities are unable or unwilling to prosecute cases.

The ICC requires 60 countries to ratify the treaty before it enters into the force of law. Advocates of the International Criminal Court are concerned that the U.S. will use its considerable influence to block ratification and prevent the treaty from entering into force of law.

So when someone asks you how you would respond to terrorism if you're not for bombing African pharmaceutical plants, tell 'em, "I'd prosecute the terrorists in the International Criminal Court, except that the United States refuses to sign the treaty!"

Contact Carl Nyberg for more information at:

P.O. Box 3996
Oak Park, IL 60303
(708) 763-8692
mosquito@mcs.net

Carl Nyberg is a member of the Chicago VVAW Chapter.

VVAW expresses its best wishes and condolences to long-time National Coordinator Pete Zastrow and his family on the passing of his father.

The Nuts and Bolts of VA Health Care Enrollment

JIM HALL

Let's start by stomping out a fire caused by an Internet rumor that said veterans would lose their VA medical benefits if they weren't enrolled for VA health care by Oct. 1, 1998. It isn't true and never has been, and that's straight from the VA and the DAV!

Now, the nuts and bolts of the VA Patient Enrollment System ... Why even have a VA Patient Enrollment System? Is it a ploy to create more paperwork to make it harder or eliminate health care services at VA medical centers? Absolutely not! It's part of the Veterans Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996, and mandates an enrollment system be in place by October 1, 1998.

Note the words "be in place." It doesn't say anything about losing your eligibility. Not only that, if you've received health care service at a VA medical facility since October 1, 1996, an application will be processed automatically for you. In fact, you're not even required to enroll if you have a service-connected disability of 50% or more, are seeking VA medical care only for a service-connected disability, or were discharged from active duty less than a year ago for a condition not yet rated compensable by VA.

"That's great," you're thinking, "but I don't fall into that category."

No Problem. Veterans who may need VA healthcare in the future are encouraged to apply for enrollment. It's easy to apply. Just contact your nearest VA medical facility for an application, fill it out and mail it in. Your application will be reviewed by VA and you'll be assigned to one of the seven new priority groups. When you are assigned to a priority group, you'll be notified by the VA. They'll even confirm your preferred primary care facility.

For veterans who wait until after Oct. 1, 1998, you can enroll at the time care is needed, even after Oct. 1, 1998.

There are a number of advantages to early enrollment. First, you get it out of the way and don't have to worry about it any more. That eliminates doing more paperwork when you go to the VA medical facility for treatment. It also helps the VA develop more comprehensive services based on a known veteran population and their needs. VA health care services will also be easier to obtain from one VA medical facility to another because they can share information more readily. For veterans traveling, moving or residing in different parts of the country at different times of the year, that's a big plus. And these are just some of the advantages. A VA enrollment hotline has been established to provide information on enrollment, enrollment forms, and additional information. The hotline number is 1-877-222-8387 and is staffed from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., eastern time, Monday through Saturday.

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My View

JOHN ZUTZ

The old chestnuts keep coming back. Again there is a move in Congress to amend the Constitution and protect the flag from desecration. I have argued strongly in this space against the proposed amendment on the grounds that it would curtail free speech and interfere with private property rights.

However, new evidence is in which has caused me to reconsider my stand.

First, I've been told that the American Legion has spent well over $1.5 million lobbying in support of the act, and that they are prepared to contribute more. When the largest veterans' organization in the United States diverts that much money away from veterans and their dependents, and gives it instead to the lawyers, lobbyists, and politicians supporting any other issue, a guy begins to understand the real values of this country.

Second, a short news report from Beijing ran in the Milwaukee paper on April 15 — tax day — relating how Chinese peasant Li San Hua illegally bought a hunting rifle, then wanted to test its accuracy. He would only have faced a fine if he had used anything for a target other than the national flag. The court in Hubei province sentenced Li to 20 years in prison for flag desecration.

So, like I said, I have reconsidered my stand. Now I am even more opposed to any action to outlaw flag desecration. Let's keep America free.

Why would the Legion, or any other "patriotic" group advocate something that would make our country more like that godless totalitarian dictatorship? They must have been infiltrated by Commies.

JOHN ZUTZ IS A MEMBER OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER AND A FORMER VVAW REGIONAL COORDINATOR.

Social Justice Activism: No Generational Boundaries

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is easy to feel powerless. And that's no mistake — the system is set up to disempower, to create the illusion that change is hopeless, that with their media, their money, and their legal system, that somehow we're stuck with the status quo. But that's not power. Power is about being able to translate a perception of social injustice — that sickening feeling you get watching the evening news, that anger at being witness to brutality — translating that into a program of action. It's about compassionate, searching minds. It's about people acting in solidarity to promote justice. And it can't fail because you can't arrest, imprison, or kill an instinct for justice, and this is exactly what has been nurtured by the symbiotic relationship between VVAW and the next generation of student activists.

The best way to honor the sisters and brothers we've lost in struggle is to continue to work for justice. I think it goes something like: "Remember the dead, and fight like hell for the living."

As students involved in VVAW, we are here to bear witness, to become part of what we have learned, and to speak to power those truths which you have imparted to us, and we will continue to do so and to tell your stories long after you are gone!

BROOKE ANDERSON IS A JUNIOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS. SHE CURRENTLY WORKS WITH THE PROGRESSIVE RESOURCE/ACTION COOPERATIVE IN THE STRUGGLE TO ELIMINATE "CHIEF ILLINIWEK" AS THE RACIST MASCOT AND SYMBOL OF THE UNIVERSITY.

Letters to VVAW

Hello friends in VVAW,

I am writing to give you some good news and ask for your help.

"Another Brother," the documentary about my late husband, VVAW member Clarence Fitch, will be shown on national TV — PBS — on February 11th during Black History Month. This is a wonderful opportunity to ensure that this film is seen by a broad audience, but we need VVAW's help in getting the word out in local communities.

There are several ways VVAW as an organization and individual members can help:

1) Contact local PBS affiliates to encourage them to pick up the program — it will be supplied via "hard feed" by national PBS to them at no cost, but they have to decide to show it.

2) Do a mailing to local contacts with the date and time of the local showing.

3) Contact local press to get them to review the film and/or do a story about it. We can provide press materials.

4) Organize an event like a community meeting in conjunction with the showing to draw attention to it and to explore the issues that the film raises.

5) Send us any contacts or ideas for fundraising — we desperately need money to distribute the film.

Additionally, we are looking for a veteran(s) with some name recognition to give us a quote about the film for our promotional materials.

I hope VVAW will see this as an important opportunity to advance the vital work that you are doing.

Please get in touch ASAP with ideas, contacts, plans, etc. or contact me with any questions either by e-mail or by phone at (617) 876-0984.

Thanks!

Elena Schwolsky-Fitch
<Elena.Schwolsky-Fitch@state.ma.us>

To VVAW,

Having grown up in central Ohio, I read with interest +/- 75% of the articles by Mike Harden in the ***Dispatch***. It is not a perfect world, and perhaps I should be pleased that any coverage is given to the Vietnam wounds he portrays in the series of articles. Harden and the photographer are vets of the war and returned to Vietnam, and they seem to have what VVAW vets would see as an enlightened view, but his writing is laced throughout with racist stereotypes cloaked in the guise of the returning emotion-burdened vet. I'm wondering if anyone else is offended by some of the recurring themes in his writing. Is he blind to his prejudices or does his work fit a view perpetuated by ignorance and racism? To name a few, his work contains the familiar images of rats in the streets, language malaprops of the Vietnamese and venality seemingly steeped in the ancient culture as well as in the newly developed capitalism. His observations are universals of the human condition: you are never more than 30 feet from a rat in the NYC subway, everybody commits language malaprops when learning a new language and culture. But (he is not alone in this) when you read these articles they perpetuate the stereotypes we grew up with in a new audience. He is writing to a new generation of readers, most of whom have no idea of what Vietnam is. And the beat goes on.

Underlying all of this is the paternalist western capitalist view that everybody only wants what we have and are trying to assimilate U.S. culture and goods as fast as they can. One of my earliest observations, circa 1971, upon arrival in SEA, was that we take such great self-satisfaction from our domination of the culture when we import our war machine on a country. We assume the self-congratulating prophecy and pat ourselves on the back when we see Coke signs and Zippos being sold in the streets. "They're dying to be like us; they want our stuff, to have what we have. Blue jeans, rock 'n' roll and western capitalism are instinctive and will be indigenous to the culture wherever we go. Therefore we are right and it is our manifest destiny to dominate."

If I'm not too far off base here, and there is some consensus in VVAW, perhaps we could send him a critique. I will send my solo "letter to the editor," but first I thought I'd see if there is additional support. I am tired of seeing these stereotypes perpetuated in the mainstream press.

I'd welcome anyone else's comments.

Steve Geiger, U.S.A.F., '69-'73
<geig@nep.net>

Dear Sisters and Brothers in VVAW,

I am grateful to so many for coming to stand with us at Operation 11th Hour. It moved us to hear so many speak from their hearts.

The morning of the 11th arrived heavy with rain and wind. By 9:00 a.m. a homeless vet said, "Look, there's a rainbow. God is healing us!" And so the rest of the day was like summer. The only drops that fell were tears of reconciliation and relief for the WWII, Korean, Vietnam and Gulf War veterans, mothers, and wives. It is healing prayer when we can gather and speak deeply from our hearts.

Accounts of many veterans and peace makers including Daniel Ellsberg, Le Ly Hayslip, the play by Thich Nhat Hanh, and the fine singing of Vietnam veteran Frank Bullard was well enjoyed by over 500 people that came in and out during the event.

At 11 a.m. we observed a silent vigil for the 100,000,000 people whose lives were taken in the wars of this century. Le Ly Hayslip rang the Bell of Mindfulness 11 times. Each time, Fr. Richard McSorley, WWII POW, and Jim Murphy of Vietnam Veterans Against the War lighted a joss stick for veterans and families to place in the grass along the memorial's powerful depiction of the untold costs of war and peace making.

I know the war is still very near to the children of Vietnam and Iraq. But I feel Operation 11th Hour was a small part of something beautiful to help bring war to an end — even if just for our families and ourselves. Peace has to start in each one's life — then hand to hand.

Many veterans were moved by the play. A huge Vietnam veteran came up to one of the cast and said tearfully, "You have no idea what you have done for my life today. It's as if the (Vietnamese) woman I killed came down from the stage and said, don't worry any more, I forgive you."

Ron Landsel
Maple Ridge Bruderhof

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.

VVAW Membership

PO Box 2067, Station A

Champaign, IL 61825-2067

Membership Application

Name_____

Address _____

City_____ State_____ Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail address_____

Dates of Service (if applicable) _____

Branch _____

Unit _____

Overseas Duty _____

Dates _____

Military Occupation _____

Rank _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW e-mail list

Membership in VVAW is open to all people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The initiation fee is $20.00, sent to the National Office (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

VVAW is a democratic organization. Chapters decide on local programs and projects under the general guidelines of the national program. Chapters elect local leadership and representatives to annual national meetings where major organizational decisions are made and national coordinators elected. These coordinators are responsible for the day to day organizational leadership of VVAW and issuing national publications.

Signature _____

Date _____

(Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.)

MACV Insignia

US Military Assistance Command (MACV) [official design by the institute of Heraldry, US Army]. Under this insignia 60,000 Americans and 3 million Vietnamese died.

Yellow and red are the Vietnam colors. The red ground alludes to the infiltration and aggression from beyond the embattled yellow "wall" (i.e. The Great Wall of China). The opening in the wall through which this infiltration and aggression flow is blocked by the white sword representing United States military aid and support. The wall is arched and the sword pointed upward in reference to the offensive action pushing the aggression back.

It was first issued to the 12,000 "advisors" in Vietnam in March of 1963.

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. As with all the propaganda put out by the government to justify US intervention in Indochina, the MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China, but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is 30 years old. It belongs to VVAW and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without permission.

Beware of VVAW AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individualists calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist." Their activities are centered mainly in Seattle, San Francisco and New York City. They often claim to be part of our organization and their most recent antics include burning American flags at demonstrations.

"VVAW AI" is not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW. They are not affiliated with us in any way. "VVAW AI" is actually the creation of an obscure, ultra-left sect called the Revolutionary Communist Party and is designed to pimp off of VVAW's history of struggle and continued activism. Their objective is to create confusion and deception in order to promote themselves.

We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit. Don't be fooled: they are not what they claim. Forewarned is forearmed.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.

For more information and to make donations:

- VVAW, PO Box 408594, Chicago , IL 60640
- 773-327-5756
- vvaw@prairienet.org
- http://www.prairienet.org/vvaw/

RECOLLECTIONS

How King's Words "Lived" in Chicago, 1968

DAVE DELLINGER

I was asked by ***The Veteran*** to write about my memories of the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. Let me say that two factors contributed to the atmosphere at that convention: first, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. about four months earlier; second, the new-found radicalism of King, which probably caused his death.

In response to his assasination there were widespread Black protests, including riots. Apparently the police in Chicago understood the reason for these activities and were more human and lenient than the reactionary Mayor Daley desired. So Daley berated them and issued orders that in any future disturbances the police should "shoot arsonists and looters — arsonists to kill and looters to maim." In the months between this order and the convention, the City kept asserting plans to shoot any violators of the City's streets, even nonviolent ones.

The Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam and the Yippies tried for months to negotiate permits for nonviolent demonstrations. We were constantly denied the permits and threatened with extreme violence if we demonstrated without them. By contrast, a permit was issued to Senator Eugene McCarthy for a large-scale rally by his supporters. But as the time approached, the City used so much violence against local and regional anti-war demonstrators that McCarthy and his lieutenant, Allard Lowenstein, cancelled the rally and urged all demonstrators to stay home "in order to avoid bloodshed."

In April 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. for the first time spoke and marched against the war in Vietnam. By making this step and having been attacked for it by Ralph Bunche, a top Black American official at the United Nations, by the NAACP, the ***New York Times*** and many others, he radicalized the relatively conservative, top-down, mostly exclusive anti-racist approach that he had felt necessary to follow earlier. Now he began to organize a radical Poor People's Campaign that involved all oppressed peoples and called for radical changes in the elitist money economy.

Here are some of the statements that he made during that Campaign; I cite them here because I referred to them every time I could during the 1968 convention:

"For years I labored with the idea of reforming the existing institutions..., a little change here, a little change there. Now I feel quite differently. I think you've got to have a reconstruction of the entire society, a revolution of values."

"We can't have a system where some people live in superfluous, inordinate wealth, while others live in abject, deadening poverty. From now on, our movement must take on basic class issues between the privileged and the underprivileged."

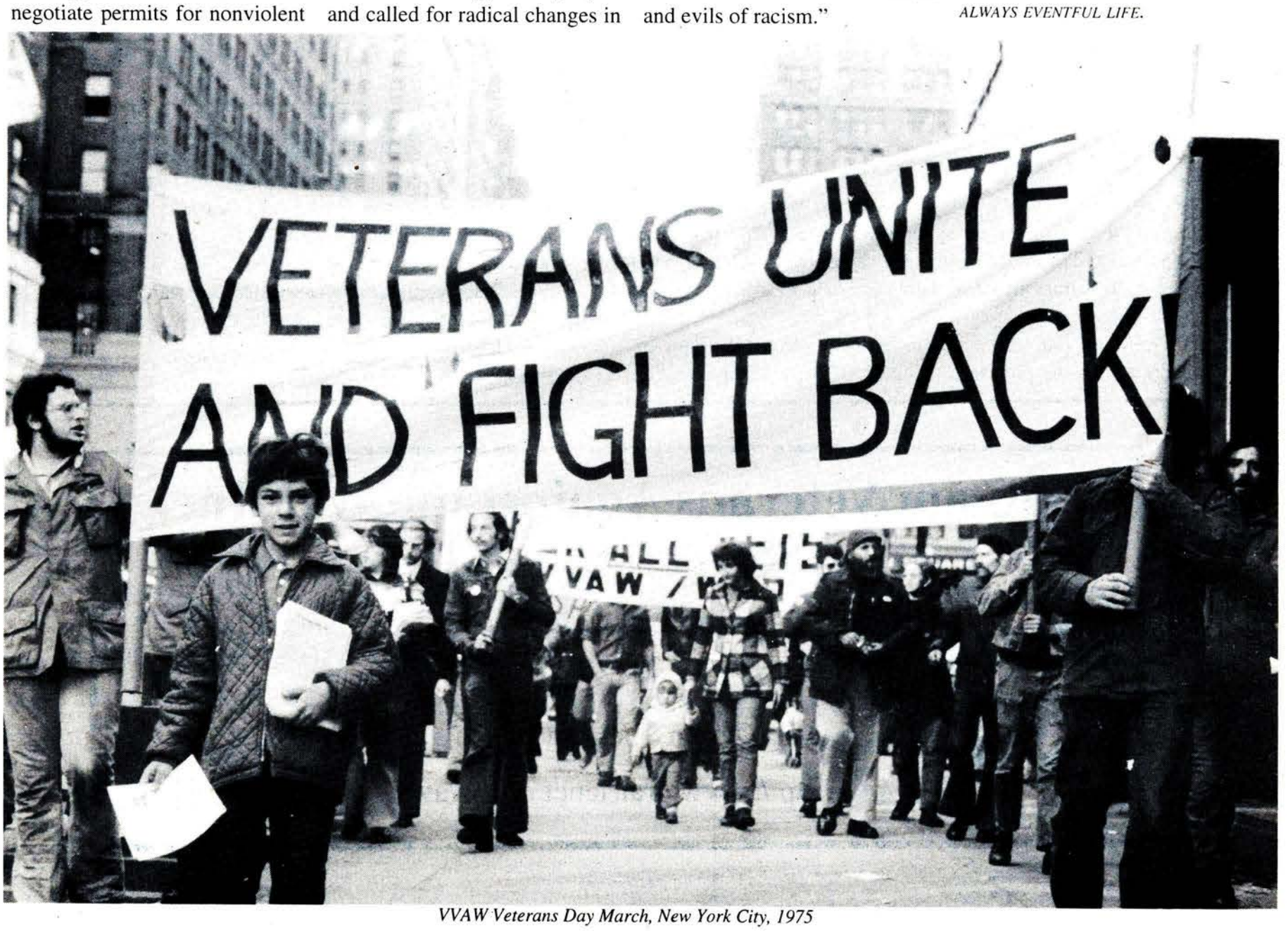
"Something is wrong with capitalism as it now stands in the United States. We are not interested in being integrated into this value structure. Power must be relocated, a radical restructuring of power must take place."

"The evils of capitalism are as real as the evils of militarism and evils of racism."

"Nonviolent protest must now mature to a new level....mass civil disobedience....There must be more than a statement to the larger society, there must be a force that interrupts its functioning at some key point."

Before the 1968 convention I did not know how many Vietnam veterans would be there. And I had hardly heard of VVAW. Its glory days began in the Spring of 1971 when members threw away their medals onto the steps of the Capitol. But we soon discovered our joint solidarity, not only against the Vietnam War but also in solidarity with the recent anti-capitalist views that King had articulated shortly before his assassination. Ever since, I have treasured VVAW and love to work with it as much as I can. Veterans have special insights that all of us need in our work for justice, human rights and an end to militarism.

DAVE DELLINGER IS A LONGTIME PEACE AND JUSTICE ACTIVIST WHOSE BOOK "FROM YALE TO JAIL" (PANTHEON, 1993) RECORDS HIS ALWAYS EVENTFUL LIFE.



VVAW Veterans Day March, New York City, 1975